

Memoir of Richard Blat During Hitler's Regime

This tape was made between two brothers -- Richard Blat and Samuel Blatt, Miami Beach, Florida, 1975.

Richard: "I will tell you that my brother Sam has an urge to buy mechanical trinkets and he is turning here and turning there and tells me to talk into this "mabericha". It's a good thing he doesn't drive a car with buttons, otherwise he would have that too!

You are a friend of my brother's and since he never told you about the shtetl (suburb, city, village, town) called Belchatow (Poland) – you never knew of it? Well, I'll tell you. It's a shtetl more than all shtetls. A shtetl that is rich, rich in things. That is honest workers that work all year, every day of the year, except a holiday that they don't work. There's not such a thing as "vacation", as you call it in America. There is no rest time. Summer and Winter – then it comes Pesach (Passover) you don't work. Chalemoid – that's his holiday (Chalemoid is between the first and end days of Passover). In Belchatow there is like in a shtetlech a "Shul" (Temple), a "Besmedrish", a Rabbi – heh, can there be a shtetl without a Rabbi or Mohel? (one who performs circumcisions).

There are all kinds of political parties –Zionists, Poli Zionists, Right wingers, left wingers and the Kulture club. It's really a wonderful thing. It was like getting together from all the shtetls to talk and discuss things – a gathering, a dance, a reading circle-- able to get together with friends and talk things over – how the whole situation looked from around the world.

In the 22nd year (1922) there was a party split, like we say a "revolution" the Kulture Farein fell apart, both parties, at night even before the split – oy I forgot, even before we stated to talk, the Pure (Main Organization) came in at night and took out all the library books – didn't leave any – about 500 books. You know, in Belchatow, 500 books was like a million – they broke the windows, the walls, all the things in the room (it was like a little house), not one pane of glass, destroyed it with boards, nothing was left.

I wasn't home at that time. I used to ride around away from home, all the time when the war started 1915 the First World War. When I got hungry I came home and then rode away again.

When the revolution was in Hungary, (Bella Kuhn the leader), I was too young to take a gun, but I worked in the coal mine. When I got hungry again, I went home, made a suit of clothes, took some money from my mother and again rode away.

In 1922 when the split began, it was a terrible thing. The Bundt mixed themselves in with the group and took books and documents and moved in to Comrade Avron Lieb. Comrade Avron Lieb was a baker. He had a large room, two rooms I mean. I think it was two rooms.

The leftists moved in too; Moishe Eisen, Moishe Shmulowitz. There they did their work, their dedicated work. The dramatic group also were not too rich; they did not have too much talent in Belchatow. But they had enough to perform very good things. I mean like the last one that I saw – THE JEWISH GIRL and other like Bimkus' (the writer) GENUVIN (thieves) and MIRALA EFRIS.

When the Kulture Farein fell apart, nothing was left. Everyone ran in different directions – everyone wanted to join a larger group. The Poli Zionists had a small amount of talent, not big talent. Moishe Shmulowitz was the chairman of the Kulture Farein. The greater part of the dramatic group was broken up or split. But it gathered again together into a stronger group and Moshe Eisner gave it his most energy, attention and was the most talented.

In 1922, Moishe Shmulowitz arranged a banquet in my honor, before I rode away. There were represented Shindel (a girl), Moishe Shmulowitz, Moishe Abramchick, Moishe Eisen, Chaya Bina Sostofsky, and others. Who know who else – Esther Dhmulowitz. Who can remember all the names? Impossible! It's a world of years that have gone by. Also there was Itzak Benchkosky. I was always forgetting his name. How it was possible to forget his name, I don't know! He recited his own poetry. I believe the first time I heard Itzik Benchkofsky with such enthusiasm, he was reciting a thing about Belchatow. At that time, it stuck in my mind. I believe I'll never forget it. Till now, 1975, I didn't forget it!

BELCHATOW

By Itzik Benchkofsky
Told by Richard Blat

"From America to Warsaw, there came a well-known Socialist
Really, a Jew and not a Crist (Gentile)
Among others things, he also found out about Belchatow
So he decided that not to be in Belchatow would make a lot of people
unhappy.

He quickly runs to the train and rides toward Belchatow
He comes into the town and sees the
Panorama of the factories and shingle type houses all together.
So he took it into his mind that here is where real like he can find.

He comes into town and meets a Rightist Bundist and asks him so nice –
Pardon, where is here the Kulture Farein?"
He tells him, "It's not far – on the Belchatifkn Street
I can describe how it looks like windows that are covered up, in a small
house."
"It doesn't matter", And fast he ran and found the Kulture Farein.

He came in and wondered – this is a Kulture Farein?
A bin that holds wood for burning? And he runs out with a loud laugh and
asks: "Where is there here the Bundt, the real one?"
And someone shows him that it's not far away – by Comrade Avrom Leib.
Fast he ran there and met Avrom Lieb.
He went in and turned "dead and red"- an organization full of bread!
(I told you he was a baker, heh, heh, no wonder he has bread, if only the
others from the shtetl had bread).

From all the society groups, there existed a worker's home (Leftist
Polizionist). He quickly ran and entered the workers' home.
He comes in and almost springs out of his skin,
When he unexpectedly sees a peasant sitting with a pot of potatoes and
cabbage. From seeing all this, he almost had apoplexy
When he reminded himself that there is still a dramatic group.
He wanted to see a play called the "Dybyk"
He was told they still had 18 months rehearsal. So he let out a big yawn,
And away from Belchatow he ran.

Well, what else can I tell you about this shtetl if you didn't know? In this shtetl there were 80% weavers, hand weavers that worked on hand looms, 18 hours a day. This was not even enough for bread. In the shtetl the air was clear, because the train was 24 kilometers from us in Pietrakov. This means we had to go three to four hours by foot, or by wagon running after it. A wagon with a shiny horse. The wagon had raw material, cotton, etc. in it.

I want to tell you that all the words that Itzak Benchkofsky used, I couldn't end, I didn't want to end it. And if my brother wouldn't work around with the marcharika, with the buttons, then everything would come out right, but maybe it won't be too bad, we'll see; you will surely tell me what mistakes I made. Bye!

Samuel to Richard: "Now, my dear brother, I would like to take this opportunity to ask you – that all these years I have avoided asking you – the hurting questions of your troubles in the Nazi camps. I would like you to tell us how you were able to avoid – how you outsmarted the Nazi's – how you came about being saved and that now we are happy together. (Uncle Richard's tattoo number is 176820.)

Richard: "Ach, I can tell you – it's a hard thing, because it is beholden with a lot of memories. The memories are very difficult to relate. I don't believe it will be easy for you to understand it all.....

Imagine, when you look at an airplane that is falling down and you know there are people in there – how can you portray their condition, their fright? And yet, after everything when it happened and we see the bodies on the television, everyone makes a "nebich" (tsk, tsk – oy vay) but no one knew the suffering that they went through till their death. Understand, Brotchick? (Brotchick = dear brother.)

Well, I'll tell you something that happened. This was Yom Kipper, 1944. In Blechameer, about 40 kilometers from Katowitz. We came home from work and went through a "parading gate". Music played, and so everyone knew that this meant something was not good. Every time we came home from work and music played it would be a tragedy. People were shot or were hanging – but this particular day a young boy was called out – 21 years of age, from Holland.

I can't remember his name. They hung him. Tied his hands under and the feet were bound up and he was hung oh so high like a lamp in the middle of the street – like a traffic light. That high. Well, the cord tore and he fell down. Can anyone imagine when he got up on his knees and begged for mercy and said “even the greatest murderers live when the cord breaks!”. Well, we were all standing, listening, looking. We were about 5000 Jews. In this camp we were all Jews, maybe two or three Christians. In general, the S.S. or the Wehrmacht (Hitler's soldiers) did not mix inside the camp. They just gave the order and stood at a distance with guns, but the ones who carried out these orders were the ones ordered to do it from the Jews. Those who did this were called Kasetlers (Consenters). There were quite a lot of them. Polish, Hollanders, etc. Well, can one imagine such a thing? The pain? How the heart was pounding till a second string was found? It took about 10 or 15 minutes. A live man sees his life – his memories this to relive? I cannot relate this because it is difficult.

On another example – it was the end of 1943. A Kapo – one in charge of 300 to 500 people – a Jew, I can't recall his name – ran away from camp and was not far from Katowitz on the border. He was with Christians he knew for about two weeks, but he had no way out, except to come back because it was impossible to take it out there. He always imagined that if he returned alone, they would forgive him. Then one afternoon we were returning back from work – they called us all out – hadn't even let us go into the barracks. There were then another two people getting hung – three altogether. They made an error by having this Kapo on the side. They wanted this man in the middle. After a half minute of hanging, they took the three bodies down – still alive and they moved them around so that the Kapo should be in the middle. Can you imagine how this affected us in our hearts?

Understand why it is so difficult? All, all these things were for minor things. The Hollander they hung just because he had taken his pot for eating and used a wire (from after a bombing) and tied it around so he could wear it tied instead of having to hold it in his hand. This was called “sabotage.”

Sam now says: "So tell me Richard, what's next?"

No one was clever. It's just like a fisherman catching a fish in a small pond. You can place a net from one side to the other but there are fish that can get through – they hide in a corner, not from cleverness but from luck or mazel.

In the beginning of September, 1942, I was arrested. My wife was lucky or luckier because she was late to the rendezvous we had. She is always late – so she was this time late also. It came my time to be arrested. My tragedy.

Through the night they gathered together 100 Jews that were held by the Gestapo – in a private house that they took from the Jews – took over the rich large houses. What happened through that night I can't recall too good.

The next day they took us from Brussels, Belgium, to Maline. This is altogether 15 kilometers. From here they arrested me. There were already 100 people. Just Jews. Children, old people, women, sick ones. There was no food. Once a day, they made a little cabbage. It was not really cabbage, either – more like leaves from trees. I got used to it right away, from the first day. (Uncle Richard is a very slight man.) Since I didn't have a place for my food, I took the food in my hat! It wasn't a straw hat. I knew it wasn't wasteful, because I knew it was the end.

In Maline, I met some of my friends and co-workers. We stuck together in a group and we divided and shared whatever we could to help each other. From this camp we could take along everything we had. Since I had nothing, I couldn't take anything along.

The majority of people thought they were going to work. I knew it wasn't to go to work because children, old people, sick ones are not taken to go to work. On the 7th of September we rode away. We were the eighth transport of Belgian Jews. We arrived not far from Obershlazen, Germany. You would ask why we didn't run away from the train. From the other trains a lot did run away. The greater number of them limped because they were led into the last wagon – a box car, no windows.

To our luck, or bad luck, it was a passenger train with a lot of windows. The windows were made to put down in order to open. But the door to open was locked from the outside and we couldn't open it. And even if we could run away, the fact that it was so well guarded, everyone would get shot – killed either from jumping down or from a gun. I decided to stay in the car of the train.

When we went a few kilometers, we came to a shtetl called Sacro. They called all men up to 50 years – from 16 to 50 to go out. The rest should remain. There were a lot of smart ones that didn't want to go out. Young ones. What happened to them we found out later, because at that time no one knew if the choice he made was good or bad.

Our group was all young people. We knew that young people they would taken to work. We were sure of that. Not one of us had any baggage, only what we were wearing. If one had a watch, money or whatever, it was taken away by the Gestapo. The others that had packages or suitcases were quickly taken to the camp and told to put everything in a pile on a hill. And so we slept overnight. How did we sleep? Well, we slept! The next day that hill of baggage was gone. Nothing was left. Everything was gone! Now, from there we went away to a camp to work. As we went in to that camp, another group came out. Here we saw the first tragedy. The first horror!

There were Jews from the East, Polish Jews, maybe Czechoslovakian and others from other sections came out of the camp, unable to work. They walked with their hands down like an animal, a beast – not with the head held high anymore, but with the head down. They passed us by so fast like a wind off on the side. We were led straight, not hurried, to show us that we were not being handled badly. As the other ran past us, they called out that they were from this shtetl, from that shtetl...

In this camp there wasn't any work – they just needed to move a mountain of sand – earth – from one place to another. The engineer came and said move the mountain of sand over there. We were about 100 people, from Brussels, Belgium. There were also some from France.

We pulled a small wagon, it had one wheel. We called it a 'tutchka' – I don't remember how you call it (wheelbarrow). This was from early morning, just as soon as it got light, until late in the evening. The whole working area was altogether two or three kilometers from our camp, where we lived. Ha, lived – that's what they said – "Here is where you'll live."

We had a doctor in that camp, from Latvia. He was the same doctor from the previous group. Can't recall his name. Sometimes we were able to talk and I asked him if there was a chance to get out of there and he answered only as 'sick ones'.

Now, after a few months there, I felt my strength ebbing. We ate beets, not even ripe yet – no potatoes, or other things – bread – we lived only from beets, not cabbage. The strength was so far gone.....

It was not easy work, actually, this should be done by a horse or oxen, but we did it! We had a pretty good foreman. He was Polish. There was a field and when the potatoes were cleared away, there usually was a potato left lying in the field. One of our group, we were about twelve that worked together, so one of us could go on the field to look for the potatoes. That's how it was brought in and we bake a few potatoes. We didn't work there every day. Many times we didn't find anything. I got sick from dysentery and they sent me away from there. I didn't know what was going to happen but I took all chances, because I felt that here I would die.

We were a group of perhaps 50 that were called together from other small camps and we 50 were sent away. We came to a very small camp, about two or three barracks. Each barrack had two rooms. Nothing was done at this camp, it was like a resting place, so that we could get our health back or to get us back on our feet so that we could work again. My body was so scratched, so torn up from lice and bed bugs, excuse me Sam, that's the name of the 'vantz'. There wasn't a centimeter on my body that wasn't scratched.

One day a doctor came to examine us to see if we could be sent somewhere to work. I was certain I couldn't pass, but he found me capable. What happened to the group that was not capable of working, we never knew.

We seemed to know what was happening, but not for sure. From time to time we found a paper. A 'meister' or foreman used to leave a newspaper and we took it. He knew we took it. It wasn't that they were all such dogs, there were some good dogs, bad dogs, but definitely dogs.

In this little camp we were pretty well off – we could wash. We had enough time to wash with snow, whoever wanted to – we weren't forced to wash with snow or water, if there was any. Warm water we never had. My body straightened out a little bit, but not really very good. Lice there always was. We couldn't get rid of it, because of the straw or rather the shaving from the wood. When we got rid of the lice, we got 'vansn' bugs – 3/8ths of an inch. It was terrible. Understand, Brotchick?

"Yes Richard, I understand the conditions you went through."

This camp was called Gaugaline, not too bad. From there they sent us to Blechameer. This was the first time in this camp. It was also a work camp. All were work camps, not extermination camps. This was our luck. There were two rooms. In every room were 24 people. Should I say Jews? People! There we didn't go to work. But we ate. The eating was 'rine' clean, not so clean but good. Potatoes we got every day – a little piece of bread – a little bit of margarine about as big as a cube of sugar. Two or three times a week, even a little marmalade.

Now, after six weeks being there, we went through a 'brank' – inspection line. It was like picking out who should live and who should die. We stood with the upper body bare – without a shirt – we wore only pants. And there stood the S.S. and the Wehrmacht doctors. They asked how old we were and why we are here. Everyone went through single file. I said I had dysentery and that I am 41 years old. He asked if I think I am capable and well enough to work and I said yes. These were the words and they showed me to go over there.

Now, in front of me was my friend Leon from before the war and he had trouble with his stomach; an ulcer. "Richard," he said, "I will not go to work. I'll say the truth – that I can't take it anymore." I begged him to say that he is well. Don't say "no". When he went past in the line, he said he had a sore on his stomach and that he probably needs an operation. I didn't see him anymore.

A few days later we were sent to a second camp called Anaheim. Four hundred of us rode there. We were taken from various sick camps. There we had to clean the train tracks and put them elsewhere. Ten or twelve men used to carry one shina. It's quite hard work – heavy and difficult to walk.

The first day that we arrived at this camp, the 'chief' asked who is a barber? No one raised a hand. It so happens that in Belchatow, in our shtetl where I was born, I had a friend who had a barber shop. Hehe – just seeing him cut hair, I knew how to do it. So I raised my hand. From then on my luck changed for the better. First, I did not go to work anymore. I also had access to warm water to take a bath – a shower. I want you to know that warm water – the steam water was brought in the daytime for cooking – for the cook. And so when we came home from work, there wasn't any more warm water. And in the morning, we used the warm water for coffee. Every morning there was coffee. The little bread that we got at night, with the soup, was mostly eaten at one time. Because you can't put it in a cabinet or refrigerator. There was no place to put it. And to hold it under a shirt on the body was not such a good idea because sometimes in the morning there was no more shirt because of the lice.

After a few weeks all my scratched spots were healed. I had access to clothes - even having two or three shirts to change almost every day. I was a big shot. Ech, when I made a pair of pants – since I am a tailor – I made a pair of pants for the chief cook, a Hollander. I didn't have to worry about enough food after that.

Everyone that remained alive, I want you to know, that everyone alive had to have a little luck in order to have more to eat than the next person. If he didn't have, then his strength left him. Of course, I used to share with my comrades because I had so much! I could afford to give some away. Mostly though, everyone was selfish – looking out for himself alone.

From this camp we were sent to Blechameer to work. Blechameer was a camp that was set up as a forest of pipes. It was previously a forest of trees. The trees were knocked down and a forest of pipes were set up. There was worked out a refinery to make synthetic gasoline. Benzene from coal. And there worked 45,000 people of all nationalities – war prisoners, soldiers – Russians, French, English and Americans.

We were 5,000 Jews in this camp. Always, if there were some missing from the 5,000, others would be sent in. This was like a Yiddish shtetl. We talked Yiddish and German because a lot of German Jews were there. The French and the Greeks suffered the most or had the worst of it because they didn't know Yiddish and didn't know German.

Well, this is the Blechameer that I told you about before, about the hanging. They were still there in Blechameer-the prisoners getting punished-just making forced exercises. You know, a heart cannot take running all the time, if there is asthma or emphysema. After a half hour of running, there were always 10 or 20 that fell down dead. This was their punishment. Why should there be punishment? One was late; a room was not clean or neat: they found on one person a piece of bread hidden or something else; or he was talking to a German civilian-because the shtetl was off on a side. Our camp was 5 kilometers square. There was a division--soldiers, prisoners of war, just as well as the Jews.

There were maybe a hundred different firms that did various kinds of work. I worked for the firm Timme, that worked on pipes, blacksmithing, to make various supports to put underneath to hold bigger pipes or to hold smaller ones. It was the kind of pipes that a person could stand straight walking, a 6 footer person could walk straight but there were also thinner pipes where even a small finger couldn't go through.

My overseer was called Fritz Fleisher. He should never get out of hell! It was my 2nd day of work with him when he asked me for a "kerner", hear a kerner, who knows what a kerner is? In my father's house, there was no kerner-there was but it wasn't called that. It is to make a small hold or mark on iron. You put it on the iron and give it a bang with a hammer and it makes a mark. I got such a mark on my rear and from him that for a few days I couldn't "go".

I would have preferred working with the blacksmith, Gustaf. This starts a heavy life, a life of hard work. I was a good worker so I arranged not to work with Fritz, but with Gustaf. Oh, I worked with him almost 2 years. A year and a half of hard work, but no one did me any harm. I worked so hard that a man, a strong man, a 6 footer weighing 160 pounds couldn't do the work that I did. It was as if someone was helping me lift the hammer. The

big hammer, with the small hammer to bend iron. Bending iron is not a small thing, naturally, even when it is red hot.

Well, when I became a good blacksmith helper, then I worked with all or everyone that needed me. Every foreman when he needed me used to call me. I was doing responsible work. I had a shield on my head to stop the perspiration because we welded with electric and with oxygen. That's why we had to have a whole mask and for the oxygen we needed glasses. I already had gloves. For my work in the camp, I was supposed to have a quart of milk every day. I was supposed to get shoes with leather soles not wooden soles. Shoes I got, but the milk I never saw. This was to have been for the lungs because the heat from the oxygen and the electric requires that we should drink milk. I was able to get a shower together with the foreman. We were 20 Jews that worked from our camp in that firm—similar to my kind of work, not exactly but close to that kind.

Then there were other 20 whose luck was not like ours. These were called the transport group, they could go alone to do the work – without a guard, without a soldier. It was different with the war prisoners--they were divided into groups of 20 or 30 and they were always together – they didn't go separately. If there was a little wood to carry two meters, so all 20 or 30 carried it.

The destiny of us Jews was not like that. Each of us had to do our own individual work. If it were a hard, difficult thing to carry, that two people could carry it, so two carried it, not 20.

And the blacksmiths that worked were French, Hollanders (civilians) Belgians; all volunteers and for money. Not all of them were so anxious to help Germany, but many of them went along because they were well paid. They went home on vacation to Belgium and France. A lot of them came back and a lot then, never came back.

I had wanted my wife to know that I was alive. I knew a Frenchman there (I looked him up after the war). He was from south France and he wrote a letter home to someone I knew and he used the name that my wife was called as a girl –Nina, and was told to give regards from Richard. That's how my wife knew and from then on it gave us strength to live.

All these things that happened is a lot to relate in such a short time. Rightly I should have told about each section, every camp separately, every few days, every few weeks, because there were so many things, such sad, gruesome things, terrible scenes that I can't recall all of it in such a quick passing of thoughts.

I worked with my foreman, Fritz Fleisher on a chimney of 50 meters. If a meter is 3 feet, so it is about 150 feet (50 meters = 164 feet). I had to go up the ladder, just as my overseer (foreman) did. I had to carry more on my shoulders than he did. I had to take up the burner and in the burner were two rubber tubes. It is not easy to climb a ladder of so many feet high, but I did it. Very often my eyes got blurry but I went up because it was a satisfaction for me that I worked and didn't have the S.S. or the Gestapo over me, or a bad foreman and this satisfied me that I was not spat in the face, nor called a sow Jew – dirty Jew – or dirty dog. And these remarks had a lot of times an effect on the people. Terrible!

Richard's brother Sam now asked, "Now, my brother, we know what you and the millions of others suffered in the concentration camps and a lot of them that saved themselves came home half alive. It is so difficult to bring out all the facts that you are telling us now. And I from my side want to know everything. And that shows us that we should fight so that it should never happen again – that no Hitler, no matter where, should have the chance to start such a horrible dirty job that the Hitlerites did. And that's why we are thanking you and we want to hear all the details of what happened."

Back to Richard: There is the building industry that built bunkers – that's called protection, to hide when the bombing starts. The depths were four meters thick; four meters the roof and every side four meters. It was impossible for a bomb to shatter it. No matter how large the bomb was. There was also a closed door that was hermetically sealed and a narrow entranceway and outside the entranceway was another wall from two meters by the door – so that nothing could hurt it. As long as we didn't produce the gasoline, the synthetic gasoline, we weren't bombed. Of course planes flew by – American, English, Russian, but nothing was bombed because it wasn't necessary. But the day we were going to start

production on the gasoline, the airplanes started bombing. I didn't count them; it was impossible to count. There were maybe 40 planes – a lot and the fright of the bombs was no less – a lot!

As long as we weren't bombed, the Jews could go in the bunkers with the foreman together and no one disturbed us. But the first day of bombing all the Jews had to go out of the shelters. The S.S. didn't allow us in. It wasn't the S.S. then. The S.S. were there before the bombing started. The Jews had to go out of the bunkers and they had no place to hide from the bombs.

I remember going out of the shelter and the bombs were falling. I threw myself down near a tank where there was already gasoline. Just imagine if there had fallen a bomb! But such things we didn't think of, that there could be something worse than a bomb. There were hundreds dead after such a bombing. Mostly Jews and a few gypsies, because the prisoners were allowed to be in the bunkers. A hundred, two hundred, maybe three hundred dead and in the evening we had to carry the bodies back because that's how we were counted (the bodies) or the numbers on the hand, the tattoo numbers. My number is 176820. I want to remark that it's hard because I believe I'm mixing up previous with now or the now and previous.

When we got to Blechameer, it was not then a concentration camp. It was a work camp. We became a concentration camp in April, 1944. Then we were all numbered on the arms, a tattoo. My number is one of those numbers. Number 176820. It always went up to 200,000. After the number 200,000, they made a second number – a "B" or "E" or "C" before the number. It was never 5 numbers, always 6 numbers, also not 7 numbers. And that's when they brought in the S.S. to us. Previously there were older soldiers from the Wehrmacht, the regular German army, 60-65 years old. I previously mentioned that not all of them were dogs, not bad dogs or better dogs, but dogs they were, but not so terrible. We then we could get along because they were not the ones that destroyed or hit us. Sometimes we had a crazy one but the S.S. were all crazy – the ones that were brought back from the Russian front – every one of them. Not one of them was normal.

The American airplanes used to come only during the day. The English came at night. The fear from the planes was so great, it was terrible.

There just wasn't a place to hide, where to go for safety. There should be somewhere we could lie down – under a pipe.

Ah, as a matter of fact, a group of 20 with their supervisor, that is their chief – all 21 of them – hid in a pipe. It was two inches thick, five centimeters of thick steel and after the bombing, this pipe looked like, how can I describe it – it was flowers – it became flowers from the iron – from the steel, with the people together. Not one of them remained alive. There really never was a place to hide. And after a while we were so used to it that we didn't run for any shelter anymore.

In those years, Blechameer was (??). There was a Jew from Vienna, who spoke a poor Jewish, but good German. He wasn't a bad person but was a Jewish chief – that is he was in charge of 5,000 Jews. He has to be very often a rotten person, because he had to please and do what the Germans wanted. It was his whole staff – there were Hollanders, Polish Jews, doctors, nurses – that were working in a kind of hospital. From this hospital no one ever came back to the camp. Most of the time they were sent away to Auschwitz after being there a few days, or from the experiments made there, all of which we made from Jewish doctors, mostly, well even these doctors didn't remain alive afterwards. I want to bring out a fact the way a doctor acted there. There was a doctor there – Polish Jewish doctors – Jews – there weren't any other there. No other doctors. In my room were six doctors, French, German, Viennese, but they didn't play the role of doctor. Most of them played the role of nurse at the work place. They had red crosses on them like a turban and the medicines they carried – the medicines were about 10 or 20 aspirins and a piece of bandage used for tying a wound. These were his medicines. You know what iodiner is? Here they call it iodine. This he also didn't have. And this was such an important thing to have for a wound, especially for the people who work with iron or tin-zinc. We needed such things to quickly stop the blood or to take the rust away that the iron made.

Another story or fact that we lived through in the office from the hospital I already told you that I was a room head. It was really nothing. It's really not more than to see that everything is in order – no privileges. I went with someone who had fever into the hospital office. In that office was a doctor from my room who had wanted to join the group of doctors and had said that he is a doctor who would like to work in the hospital. He was very thin, maybe he weighed 100 pounds. So the doctor – the chief was wearing

riding pants – high boots – dressed as if he were a land owner and he stood so straight with his hands in his pockets and kept movement with his knees and told him; “With such a face, you are a doctor? Go back.” Because that doctor with the boots and riding pants was certainly a horse person and not a doctor. These are the tales or facts that we often heard.

I had luck with the person I brought in when he had a little fever. He got two aspirins and was very well treated and was told he had no more fever – to go back. They treated him so well that he remained alive. It didn’t take them long. I spoke with this person later, a German about 22 or 23 years old.

Then there was such a thing as a block master. Every block had six rooms. I told you already how the beds were set up. I was a tailor – I am now also a tailor – I work for my wife! When the S.S. took over the camp, the food was very clean but we had only a little. We just got more bread. There were peeled potatoes, not cooked with the skin. While before there was a lot more, but it wasn’t clean food. Everything was dirtier, it wasn’t clean but we ate it because we were hungry.

The block master knew that I was a tailor and he wanted me to make him a jacket. It is like the Marines wore as their winter coats. Shorter than the knees, with four or six pockets. A sewing machine I did not have. He brought me such a heavy coat and it didn’t have any pockets, so it was easy to make a garment that he wanted – the jacket. I didn’t have a thimble so I made one from a piece of pipe and made the holes of the thimble with a nail so that the needle can hold itself. The holes are the indentations of the thimble. I sewed that coat all by hand, stayed awake half the night and sewed it. All the people had time to do something – to listen, to read, or whatever to do for themselves. Why did I do the jacket? All for a little food. The block master divides the food. Prior to this, when it was not a concentration camp, we received our food in the eating room – dining room – mess hall. We stood in a long row, each with his plate and everyone got to eat. A man who had a little more mazel (good fortune) got a thicker spoonful of food and the one who didn’t have such mazel got a thinner spoonful. It wasn’t potatoes, it was nothing! The block master was from Lodz and I already forgot his name. He promised me 50 “mitiger”, that is 50 soups, if I’ll make him the coat and if he’ll be satisfied. You think he gave me from his share? Did he think the food belonged to him? He took some off each bowl! All that I ate belonged to all the people from that

block. 120 people. Ach, it maybe isn't a lot, it comes out about $\frac{1}{4}$ spoon of food from each one, but still I want to tell you as before that I remarked, for everyone to remain alive, they had to have more than someone else. Otherwise it was impossible to remain alive.

It took about three months till I made the coat. I made it and he was satisfied. He lived like a land owner. He had a servant. The servant didn't go to work. He remained in the block. He was an older person and he asked his 'boss' what he should make him for breakfast, that he has "zemel", a roll. And he answered – What, I should again eat a dried roll with butter? He had butter, yes, butter, real butter! From where, from who? I don't know but he had "zemel, a zemel like we buy in the bakery. How does it happen that I'm talking about zemel with butter? I remarked before that in my room were a few doctors - 5 or 6 doctors. We were always talking, discussing how we could heal the wounds. It was sores that we had from lack of nourishment. Several people had a cyst and this never heals, but as it runs out - the dirt from within, as it drains out, it infects the area it runs down on and that also gets rotten, infected. So, therefore, we always discussed and talked about how perhaps we could give away some bread in exchange for margarine. If we could have a little more fat in the body, maybe it would help. So they figured out how much we needed. Well, who could work? Eh, it was a little larger – it wasn't so tiny, but as you work hard, you need more to eat. For a person who didn't work, it would have been enough. But we could never figure out how to make, how to do, how to find out how to save ourselves from these sores.

I had such a cyst on my hand, my right arm, near the elbow or a little lower. I only had one way out. The doctor said "Break it open!" Humph, I was a sort of blacksmith, so I worked something out – I made a head from a nail and I burnt it on white heat – not red, and I put it on and burnt out the sore and spread some margarine and put on a rag and tied it and then untied it maybe 6 months later and it was healed! Not everyone works as a blacksmith and not everyone has the will power to do what I did!

I want to go back to that day we became a concentration camp. Till then we had civilian clothes. This wasn't so bad. It was warmer. When it was wintertime we got a heavier coat. I had a coat, the lining was a fur pelt. But the day that summer arrived, that day we had to give away the pelt, the winter coat and in return we got the striped pajamas, the striped suits from the camp, like the S.S.

I trimmed off the lining (pelts) from the coat and put it in a pipe on the (??) where I worked and covered it with another piece of iron and welded it with a disinfectant. I don't know how it's called, not in Yiddish and not in German. In Yiddish it's also known as "karbut" – carbon disinfectant. After the summer I took it out and wore it under the striped jacket. It looked a little tight on me but it was very good – in the morning it was very cold. We would get up at 4:00 am.

It was still dark at that hour and they started yelling "Coffee – wash the floors – the bathrooms – make the bed – clean the pots with the dishes, etc." Most of us took the dishes to the food line because there we got a soup from the company – water it was – it wasn't soup and in addition it stunk! Excuse me, it tasted bad!

In the camp I had a friend, a Parisian. Manischewitz was his name. He was a watchmaker and a watchmaker, there!! If he were "put on" from the camp, a Jew "elder" – he became a "king" because he was working for the Germans, fixing watches and other things. Who knows how he became a king and what else he had. One time I made him a jacket and I had turned it inside out – it could be turned inside out – worn both ways. Anyway, he called me in quite often and gave me something to eat.

The Soviet Army beat the Germans, the German beasts, and they started moving closer to Warsaw. So all the S.S. started to go wild. They hit, killed, shot, just like in a crazy house. And as the German Army retreated from the front and they came closer to the Polish border line and the Germans slowly started to clear the prisoners of war from the concentration camps and the surrounding area from Auschwitz, the kind of camps we were in and other kinds of works – most of the camps were the ones that made the sort of gasoline. Others made margarine, all from coal, soap from people's skin, peoples fat, yes, I'm talking about soap. The soap doesn't have the substance and it didn't have any strength. My wife still has a piece of soap that I brought home.

When they cleared the camps, they brought everything into our camp, overnight. They stayed one night and the next morning they went away. When they came from the other camps it seemed to us – we had a feeling the today, tomorrow, we too will go away. The ones that come to us had

been in very bad camps. The people looked a lot worse than we did. The difference between our camp and their camp was a tremendous big one. I once told you how our beds looked, that we had to lie two in one bed. My luck, also, was that I had a bed for myself. We were advised that by January 21st we would go away. Either yes or no. If no, we remain in the camp and have the chance of all getting killed by the S.S. If we go out, then we will go into the woods. We really didn't know the right thing to do. We could have remained in the camp and hid somewhere. There was a section in the camp, we called it a "disease", a horror! That's where the crematorium was. There was only an oven. We were a group of four that were friendly, we were very close. Two were from Bessarabia, one was from Vienna and myself. We didn't know what we should decide to do. To take the chance and stay in the camp, to hide, or what? There was still another possibility. We could escape while we were leaving. But where do we run? Money we didn't have; clothes we didn't have. The hair was cut very close, very thin, ah, like 2-3 millimeters.

I told you previously about the watchmaker. In going away, he gave me a note to go to the man who was in charge of the shoe camp. They were good shoes all with soles. He didn't have shoes with wooden soles. He was a German, not a Jew. He was from the ones who had a black mark. So he told me to pick out a pair of shoes but that exchanges could not be made. I chose a pair of shoes that were surely two sizes larger than I needed, thick soles, good shoes but not mountain type shoes good for climbing hills. We were all standing in a row outside, ready to go away but still waiting for an order that we don't go. I believe there were camps that remained that weren't cleared out. This clearing out line didn't look like a line going for a demonstration or whatever was going to take place in the city where we were going with the S.S. But it all looked frightening. On each of us there hung a question – what to do? No one could tell. We, the four friends, decided that each one of us should remember something, that we each had something more than the others did. One of us had a friend, a block overseer, one had another kind of friend, and I had my watchmaker friend, each one had someone and we had more – I had a pound of margarine, a pound of honey, hard honey and I had two breads and a good pair of shoes. The others also worked at the same kind of work as I, but they had better shoes than I. They didn't have to ask a watchmaker--.

Exactly at 12 o'clock noon, they opened the doors and we went out. We went, not hurriedly, because we were not under such strain. Yes, I forgot to tell you that the S.S. did not go with us. They remained in the camp. There were about 20 or 30 of them. They didn't go with us, only the ones from the Wehrmacht went with us. The leader of them was a S.S. man and one was from the Gestapo. Maybe one or two went along from the S.S., the crazy ones.

The first tragedy we saw was about two kilometers from the camp. We went through a small bridge, and there someone remained standing. He suffered with his heart a long time, but the work he did was not so terrible. But this time right away, after we went out, he couldn't go and he remained standing and said, "What will be, will be!" He stayed till the whole column of people went through and then they chased him into the woods and they shot him. Didn't make a big fuss of someone who remained – didn't need him and they didn't need us either. Meaning they led us so that not everyone should get killed all at once, but die on the way or get shot one by one.

We went until we came to a small hamlet, not in the daytime, but late in the evening. I believe they had this figured out earlier – how far we could go and where we would stay. When we got to the hamlet, they let us in to the stall – a stall where the farmers kept their tools, machinery, and where they put the hay, straw that they took from the field and made it ready for the winter. The winter was then a terrible one. It was the end of January and very bad. It was -35 Centigrade, European way 35 under 0 – that is very cold and snow was on the ground and most of the time we couldn't see our way.

Most of the time, along the sides, were tiny rivers and we got wet up to the neck and that's how we traveled. Hey, a fire we didn't make, to dry us out. We continued four or five days. They didn't know what more to do with us, because the Russians, the Soviet Army were a few kilometers away from us on the other side of the forest. The forest was narrow, about a kilometer wide or 2 kilometers, and they didn't know what they had to do.

So they went back with us. They figured out it was better to go back than to keep forcing us to go on, because the leader, the leader of the S.S., the Gestapo were on very good terms with our chief and with the Jewish “elsten”, Demarert, so that they didn’t behave too badly to us, except if one couldn’t continue to go, if he fell or broke a leg or whatever, they shot him, because they didn’t want to let him lay in the middle of the route. We were told to carry him into the forest or they chased him into the forest if he were still able to go on.

The Bessarabian was the first of us to feel the (hands of fate) destiny. The three of them (my friends) lived in Paris. I was the only one from Belgium. They pulled a wagon for the Wehrmacht, for the soldiers. Two of us pulled this sled and two didn’t. We took turns. We weren’t allowed to say no.

A truck went by and this fellow slid and one of his legs went under the wheel. The leg was not broken but the ankle was so twisted around that he couldn’t go anymore. We were still the three that could go on and we were healthy, so we made a sled of wood. We pulled him another two or three days. Once in a stall barn he said, “Now you go and I will here try to find my destiny or I could save myself from the Germans or end it – otherwise you will suffer or perish. That’s how he decided it and that’s how it remained. We said our goodbyes and left him all that we had of our food. He hid himself in the straw, deep within, but able to have air. This was perhaps eight or nine days after we had left camp.

Every day I used to lag behind to see who from my acquaintances were still alive and who were already missing. I couldn’t see everyone because we all had one or two blankets and these were wrapped around the head or the face. The ones that had gloves had their hands inside the blanket. And that’s what I did every day. I could go very fast. I had shoes with soles but woe unto those that had wooden soles. The majority of them had wooden soles. If only these wooded soles were worked out so that one could walk, that the foot could bend with it, the shoe could bend along with it. This then would have been only half a problem. The shoes were really just a plain piece of wood, put on a piece of cloth and nailed around with a few nails – these were the shoes. Most of the time, after the first day, they no longer had shoes so they wrapped themselves around the blanket, with whatever they had over the feet and that’s how they continued to go.

As we went by the towns, the German towns, there were some who used to throw down a few apples or other food and we grabbed at it and we would fall on top of one another, everyone wanted to catch something. We didn't get any food on the way.

I want to go back a few minutes to the start so that I could explain that for 17 days, we ate soup twice, twice we had pieces of bread and the rest, oh yes, occasionally we got potatoes, once or twice, one or two, mostly they were frozen. And these are sweet. Did you ever eat frozen potatoes? Most of us couldn't or didn't have with what to take the food, for example, if there was sometime a little soup. So we took it in what we could – a hat! Who had a hat? This was not the time to say we'll wait for the other to finish so we could use his utensil – gone is gone. We went in a row for the food and we had to take it – either in the hands or whatever. Later, there was nothing.

After twelve days we came to Gross Rosen, also a camp, a very bad camp. The whole camp was full of murderers. We didn't know where to go. It was rainy weather, there wasn't even anywhere to sit, so we stood.

They brought a few kettles of soup. That's when everyone went wild. Whoever could grabbed and most of us never saw the soup. If there were a few who grabbed a whole pot with the soup, and we couldn't do anything about it. They ate the whole kettle of soup so that no one else could get any. There wasn't anyone like a "kapel" around or someone who should have been a little more human that could have seen to it that the soup would have been evenly divided. This set-up didn't exist anymore. I want to go back just a little on the way to Gross Rosen. I was talking a little too fast – jumping ahead of myself. All that way of twelve days can't be described in ten minutes or even a half hour. It's impossible to be able to relate all that happened on the way.

I remember now and tell you a tale when we went through a hamlet. We didn't see any Germans, the entire shtetl was dead. Everyone was hiding. They were afraid we might revolt and run into the houses. Yet, there were some who did run into the houses. A few may have found something – a bread, ½ a bread, a little piece, some apples and others didn't find anything and came right back out.

One man was held by a guard, our guard – a bad guard – not an S.S. man, one of the Wehrmacht – and he hit him with a gun, with the butt of the gun and he split his skull. Don't think it was a little clap or a cut or crack in the head – it was a split skull that you could put a half inch thick of something in it. In that moment the person was still normal. He didn't lose his mind right away from the crack in the head. I knew him; I worked with him in the Timme firm. A half hour or an hour later, I saw him about a mile away in the field where there was water and snow and the guards in charge didn't shoot him. They left him alone because he knew it was the end, either he'll go into the water or the hole and there he will stay and that's how it was. I never saw this person again.

I also lost another of my friends from the group of four that we were. The second Bessarabian. I didn't see the Viennese man anymore but he saw the watchmaker in Paris on his way back to Vienna.

Much more happened on this road to Gross Rosen. What should I tell you first? When we left, we were 5,000 and when we arrived at Gross Rosen at night – who knows what time? Who had watches? The supervisors had watches – we were only 2,000. That is 3,000 wasted, killed on the way. Is this a small thing – 3,000? Most of them were known to us, that is, I knew them and others knew them. The biggest portion of the 5,000 I knew personally. Perhaps not by their names, but I knew them. I used to go from one barrack to the next, talking to acquaintances, a person, questioning, listening to them etc. I didn't play cards. A lot of them played cards. Fact is, I don't play till this day.

At Gross Rosen, we lost another 800 through the night. We were only there overnight. These 800 were actually just hit with sticks, like baseball sticks, bats, hit over the head till the man fell down. Most of them were sitting in water, an inch high of water, maybe two inches high in the water. That's how they sat. There just wasn't any strength left to stand.

Me too. I wasn't different, but I didn't cry. I didn't yell so I didn't get hit. But to say that I had it good – you can be sure I'm suffering now. I was suffering then on the lungs. I'm suffering now a bit from sitting in that cold water, freezing over. You feel the water beginning to freeze on you. Raining, and when the rain stopped, you could hardly get up because your bottom was frozen to the water, to the earth.

To this day, I am suffering with my feet. Not the bottom of my feet, but from the knees up – it is dead. You can pinch it – I don't feel it. When I want to examine if my flesh has blood in it, I pinch but I don't feel it. Tens of doctors tried to figure out what this is. None know. Regardless, I keep going. I worked till I became 65 years old. I had to work a little longer because I was waiting to collect from the Union - \$75. A month.

So you see why this tale is broken up. It can't go in a straight line. I forget, I remember, I go back in time.....

From Gross Rosen we left early the next morning. Everyone got a bread, less than a full bread. The bread was a pound but the top piece was already missing because, I believe, the baker took off a piece – all the bakers did. With a piece of wurst (salami) was all we had until we came to Buchenwald. We didn't have such a good straight trip anyway going to Buchenwald. We went with a train, a very nice train. The train was box cars like a closed wagon. A wagon that carries things, assorted things. Most were closed wagons.

A group of 100 of us were put into an open car, also like an open wagon. On the wagon we had to stand straight, one behind the other, pressed together like herring. I want to tell you that this starts a new tale – a very sad one.

We were altogether a hundred there and one side of the car remained a little empty, about a quarter of the wagon. This was for the guards. One was an S.S. and the other was a Wehrmacht. The second was from Vienna. They gave us such a push from the front to the back, that we all fell and as we fell, we all looked to make a spot for us that would be comfortable to sit. Comfortable? Where we couldn't get squeezed! We went up on the wagon – we were a familiar group – two from the original four were left. We had other friends, good friends, but you can't call everyone a friend. I was sitting with my back end to a wall.

Almost everyone had gotten a pan from Gross Rosen. That was supposed to be a pan for eating. A red pan. So as we went up on the wagon and everyone sat as comfortably as we could – I was sitting by the wall and with my elbows I could make more room that way.

Heh, I told you before – it's all for yourself, not such a thing anymore as helping one another out. Let us say that we sat in round groups. We sat so we could talk or groan. A lot of them cried – remembering a friend that was left somewhere behind; remembering his home, his children. When someone needed to out for a bowel movement (letting water we did while we were sitting) but if someone had to go there was only one place – to use his pan.

We were riding in the wagon three days till the town of Weimar – this is altogether eight kilometers from Buchenwald. Can you picture those three days what we were riding from Gross Rosen to Weimar? How it was, how it looked? Can I describe it to you? I don't believe so because no one can describe it! It isn't to be described and if I should tell you, will you understand? When one of us stood up, he was immediately condemned to death from the rest of us. The hole, the place where he sat, automatically closed up because we were sitting so tight one next to the other, that there wasn't enough room for us. If one stood up, be he a brother, a father, the best friend, the closest, dearest person to him, could not help. No one could help him! He was condemned to die – the pain could not be overcome. Let's say that a friend sat on my knees, because everyone sat so that the elbows and the knees almost touched the chin from the person – the head – the face – I have to stop now, because I can't continue. It was terrible!

Now I find myself in Miami Beach by my brother Sam. I came from Los Angeles to New York and my brother came from Miami to New York. We lost our sister Rose Weiss the eldest here in America. There is also Anna Goldbarst, sister of Ruth Rosenberg where I stayed after the funeral. Then I came to Florida. I come here often, not every month but every year, every two years. My sister-in-law, Fannie, is a very lovable woman. Nu, I stay here a while, a month, two months. Who could do it? I have a wife in Los Angeles.

I made an error when I said before that we lost 800 people in Gross Rosen. We lost 800 people till Buchenwald from Gross Rosen, alone.

As we came into Weimar, we stood on a platform – where all trains stop in a depot. There were perhaps 100 trains, 50 trains, I didn't count. They were from various camps and they gathered at this depot and it didn't take long when 400 planes, American planes, since only the Americans bombed by day, 400 planes bombed the train station where we were.

What should I tell you? The wagon stood up? I mean stood up in the height with the tracks! This lasted a few hours. They always flew by 21 – three by seven, always three by seven and each time the yelling and the screaming was very loud. Oh, we could have run away, but where to run? Could we hide somewhere running fast while 21 planes go on and others follow? I sat on my wagon and I didn't move, not only me but also another whole group. A few ran away, got off the wagon. The S.S. man also hid. We didn't see him. I found a suitcase with cigarettes which way flying like a bird would fly. A satchel of cigarettes? The whole time we didn't see it. A livelihood, a possession, a fortune! I could have at that time bought half a world with that, with New York included! I divided them and I too smoked them. I didn't stop smoking until I came to Buchenwald.

They led us into tents. The camp was made from material – tents. And we sat there. People had to pass us and leave all the clothes and go across naked. And from the other side we had to take a bath and got different clothes and things. Clothes? Ach, isn't it shameful to use the word clothes? I sat a whole day. I didn't want to go inside.

You know, sometimes we say 'mazel.' There is no such thing as mazel but at that time, I did say mazel. When I finally did go through, all the barracks were taken. Every barrack had been assigned, like it was in Blechameer. They put in the people to live, two in one bed and that's what happened in Buchenwald. They weren't beds in Buchenwald but like drawers. A drawer was about two meters wide and about one meter high, called a 'neren' – like pushing yourself into a dresser. A little higher than a dresser, a chifferobe – a drawer. This was how it was divided. People were assigned and that's how they slept. They always slept in shifts. Eight hours one shift, then another group. Let's say a bed held eight people in the width so that was three times eight. Each slept their eight hours and then they had to go out. By day and by night. This was not a working camp when we arrived. I couldn't breathe there. This was the newer section of Buchenwald. In the old Buchenwald there were beds.

Well, I told you mazel - they put me in a barrack where there were French and Belgians. It was called a French barrack. How they knew that I could get along with them, I don't know. But that's how my mazel was. When it got too crowded in the camp, they sent out the Jews. In every block they had to put out the people so that the S.S. and the chief could go by and pick out a Yid, a Jew – they can be recognized - the nose, the clothes, whatever - they were recognized.

Our block was called the invalid block. I was standing with my group. From one man, I took a pipe, he also gave me a bit of a cigarette and I held the pipe in my mouth, and with the other hand, a finger, I made like I was putting in tobacco. A Jew didn't have tobacco. He couldn't possibly have a pipe that he could fill with tobacco - so they went past me and they didn't see me - they were blind! This is also mazel, no? I say it is. I can't say I was smart that way, but I outsmarted the Gestapo and the S.S.

The second time we had to be put out, I couldn't do anything and I was part of that group that was sent away – almost all there were. But I didn't want to go. I knew to leave the camp meant "Goodbye"! I didn't want that, so I sat down, I lay down, I opened and closed and tied up my shoe laces. I was busy with the laces, with all things so as not to go out with the rest till it was now 20 meters from the door. They closed the door and those on the other side of the door went away. We never saw them again or heard from them. There were a lot of my acquaintances. We were told to go back to the barracks.

The barracks became a little roomier. I want you to know that most of the time I was not assigned to those beds I told you about. The beds were from the earlier French, Belgians, and we slept wherever we could. There was an oven and every time we would lie down near the oven, we just had a little place, lying on the boards of the floor and this went on for a time and in the barracks was a Russian officer who could talk German. He was a very fine person. Everyone there got tobacco or cigarettes, not much. But the Jews were not given any tobacco. I went over to the block "elster" – to the Russian officer and asked him if a Jew does not have to smoke? He said he "couldn't help it but I can only do one thing – I have a few cigarettes – I can give you half. The second week I got tobacco like all the others, thanks to him. I was talking to him for more than half an hour in German.

He spoke German. If not, I would have talked to him with my broken Russian or Polish. I know that language a bit. I am a Pollack.

A lot of things happen in a lifetime. Usually it is always played out at its best for most people. One time I got sick. I had a fever. With fever in a camp, you can't play, fool around. Do you know what a pneumonia inflammation means? Did you ever hear of double pneumonia? Most of the time one lung is affected with inflammation. You know a person has two lungs. How do I know I had double pneumonia? Because when the doctor examined me, he told me my lungs have marks from this disease and it will never heal. There is still smoke in my lungs.

If one got sick, then the elster from that group – if someone was assigned – there was always someone like I was, a room supervisor; that person had to go to the block chief and that was the Russian officer, and so that was the one to whom I was to be referred or taken. He took two men and they took me outside of the barrack and they made a snow massage for me. I was almost unconscious. I don't know how long it took, but I could feel the massage. They wrapped me in blankets and brought me back into the barracks and laid me down in a corner like a dead one. How long? 24 hours, 12 hours. A while later they took me out of the blankets and I opened my eyes and I lived! I did not die! Someone brought me soup, warm water. It didn't take long – a day or two, I was again able to stand on my feet.

The Russian wasn't allowed to keep me in that block and as soon as I was standing on my feet, he turned me over to a sick house - if it could be called that – and when I got in there, I thought it was the end! First of all, they gave me a shower, they wouldn't give me a warm shower, oh no, it was a cold shower – ice water and the blanket they had given me was a wet one. I don't know if you can understand or realize how this reacted on me – how it appeared to me. I was lying on my board – the place assigned to me. Not on the lower one but on the higher bunk and they did nothing to me or for me and I was lying this way for two days. The food they gave us – a little soup and a piece of bread was doled out just like in the other barracks – only less of it. There were people around that worked and they took off half of what I was to have gotten. They took from the other sick people also. A sick one has to die so why does he need it; he's sick!

I wanted to see the doctor – eh, so fast can we get to a doctor? The doctor is a camp doctor, not an S.S. man. When he came in the room, in the barrack, not far from me, I stood up, moved over to the edge of my bed and I approached the doctor in German and told him I'm getting better and I feel good and I want him to discharge me. He didn't answer me but an hour later they came to tell me that I'm going back to my barrack. I got clothes because they had taken away my other clothes. When you come into a block they take away the clothes to be disinfected. It took about an hour or two when I got back to my barrack and I contacted the chief and he told me to go back to my group and that's what I did.

I was beginning to feel good and I could "go". I could wash and so on. Here no one worked. But many times they had to take people to do a certain work and every block had to gather together a certain number of people. To the one who did the dividing, the placing, it didn't matter to him who he chose as long as he didn't choose his own acquaintances. Someone else's acquaintances didn't bother him or the people he didn't know at all and of course especially those that had just arrived – he didn't know them and they were assigned to do the job. The one who led us to the work was from Czechoslovakia. I believe he was a Czech, because of his looks and his actions and I told him my problem. Every time I was part of the group, I lagged behind, I couldn't go like the others. He asked what's the matter? I told him I didn't feel good. That I was just released from the "sick room", and that's what that place was called and that I don't feel good. He told me to go back there and tell them that I told you to go back. I got back there and went to the higher room master and told them that the chief from the work sent me back. This was a good thing because the work that they did was a terrible work. These people we never saw again, because their terrible work had to remain secret so no one should know what and when it happened or what and how they were destroyed, killed, doomed, disappeared. We don't know.

One more thing. Every individual endured a horror for himself. Everyone endured it on a different level. If he had a bad time or endured a terrible experience, it could be that others had it worse than me – they endured more. If you will talk with a person that remained alive and he had no help from the outside or from others or that he could not help himself with something – that's when you'll hear worse stories than what I'm relating.

Ach, I have a tale about a father and son from Antwerp. I can't recall his name. I was with them from the first camp on and in all the camps. I worked with the father in the Timme firm. He was in that transport. The son worked elsewhere. The son was very healthy, about 28 years old. I can't recall exactly. The father was sickly, weak – a lot weaker than I. And he once had an accident. His hand was pulled out from the (??). And in the hospital by us they were able to put back the (??) and he was again able to move his hand. It happened often that he would bang himself for he would fall and the son always helped him. The son brought him food. The son helped as much as he could but it was the father, not the son, that remained alive. I saw him in Belgium after the war.

It was in the beginning of April, 1945, we were already about three months in Buchenwald, when talk started that any second the Russians were coming. But the Americans came, not the Russians. The Russians were already in the camp. The Russian officers were there when I got there. These were the captured or prisoners of war. The day the American president died, the Americans came in. President Roosevelt died April 12, 1945. We were standing by the fence so we could see a few miles away, that the American tanks were coming.

At that time our camp was empty of the S.S. and the Wehrmacht. It was at that time that a group from the Russians, French, Polish that had already taken the camp from within, not outside. They had already their (??). It didn't take long, even before the American came into the camp, for the army of Russian soldiers already left with leather (??), boots and (??). Where they got it, how they took it, no one ever found out. They didn't want to take any of us with them. Only the Russians. Several of the Frenchmen approached them. No!

When I saw the Americans coming closer to the camp, I went down to the ground and I didn't get up till the next day. Till then I had strength. If a living person can endure – can one say only when he was in camp? As long as I was there. But Polish Jews were there two years longer than we were in camp. They were there from 1940. When we got to the camp they were already stripped of their strength. It was the next day that I heard that President Roosevelt died.

I was sick. The food we got the first day was just pigs meat. Just pork, no potatoes, no nothing! There was nothing else in the camp but pork. If one is hungry, you don't stand and think for a second what could happen from this meat that we will eat with such a weak stomach, from such an undernourished stomach. Practically all got sick. I remained sick in the same barrack that I was in before. The French and the Belgians left this barrack and went where the S.S. were. And it took a few days and they were sent to places to take their planes to go to their countries.

I remained in the camp with a few other friends from Belgium. We had met before. They were in different barracks. Later we dragged ourselves to the placement section to make sure that we were not considered spies or traitors. We received papers from a committee that formed from the French, the Polish and the Russians that we had been interviewed and that we weren't traitors. We few were individuals rather than in a group. They took our names and from where we came and where we were born and what year and this paper we held on to. I have it still to this day. This was carried like a sign from Buchenwald.

After a while being there, we got food that could be better digested. We got milk and every day we started to get an egg, powdered egg, that the Americans gave in a package with various things. This we prepared and ate slowly and things got better.

Afterwards we had to go to a specified section to take a train. I remained in Germany six weeks before I got home to Belgium. My friends also. A few of them were ashamed to go home like me. I never like for anyone to make a "nebesch" (pity) over me. I needed two canes to walk. I weighed 78 pounds. Ach, I never weighed any 200 pounds when I was well or when I was home. I used to weigh 125 pounds or thereabouts. That was my weight. Now, in 1976, I am 120 pounds. 75 pounds is not more than just bones. And the bones looked like they got thinner.

I just remembered the name of the father and his son. Friedler, from Antwerp, Belgium. My friend was called Shloimick. I can't recall the family name. He was suffering since 1936 when he went to Spain. He remained throughout (??). Coming back from Spain, he was arrested in France.

That's how he remained in various camps till the Vichy government took over.

The Vichy government turned him over to the Germans and they sent him to Germany. I made this part fast, eh? It wasn't so fast in reality. It was nine years! A long time! If you ever have the opportunity to talk to Shloimick, he's still living in Brussels, Belgium, you'll hear a lot more or if you should talk to the father Friedler, you'll also hear more than from me.

Seven days we were riding in a closed wagon – a train – a pulling type train. I took seven days to get to Belgium. The door was open, a big door. The trains were not on schedule. The roadbeds were broken; the tracks were torn. We got provisions when we went over to the train. We made things ourselves. When it happened that the train had to stand a day or half a day, we went down from the wagon and we made a fire and we cooked the food. We had pots, we had everything to make the food. We had noodle soup, bouillon with noodles and canned meat. The 7 days we lived together talking among the few people about the life. We were about 10 people in the wagon. Oh, there were other wagons and we were able to talk to those people also. These 7 days didn't seem such a long time because we knew that this ride was an endurable ride. A ride that would bring us home. No one knew who was still left living in their family. I didn't know if my wife was living for these last 8 months. The last news I had from her was when they were freed. That means a month prior. They were freed in 1944, September I believe. I was freed April 1945. From that September I didn't know if she were living or not and she didn't know about me. I didn't know anything about the whole family. And my friends also didn't know. There was always a binding agreement that if one knew of anyone in particular, he also knew about 2 or 3 others and we exchanged this information one to another if it were in the same camp. A letter was enough. A regards sometime helped a person to live another year. It was Hope!

When we arrived in Belgium, I forget the name of the place – I left from Maline – it was Namir, about 45 kilometers from Brussels. There we sat in a ?? and waited for a train that was leaving for Brussels. We met one of our friends here. He was close friend that was already working. He was a salesman, ach, who remember what he was?

In Belgium, it is a custom that if we sit in a station, we have to partake of a drink-whatever-coffee, alcohol, you could drink beer, but drink! We had gotten from the Belgian authorities in Namir, when we got off the train, a hundred franc. At the start of the war, before any of us were arrested, a 100 franc was considered money! That time a pound of coffee was 10 francs, maybe less. A pound of bread was 5 francs. So drinking something and I went to my pocket to pay for the drinks. My friend said, "Don't rush to your pocket." He paid – 800 francs for those drinks! I had never heard of such a thing. We were 992 days without money. What did we know? We lived like "kings" there. We didn't know about money and here I hear it is 800 francs for a few glasses of coffee, whiskey and wine!

From this station, I telephoned Brussels. I was looking for my sister-in-law. She didn't have a telephone but I remembered where she lived. The owner of the station – the station master telephoned to the authorities in Brussels, that they should locate my sister-in-law. They found a neighbor's telephone and told them Richard is coming! This train (??) so this train was to come to the 2nd (??).

When my sister-in-law found out I was coming, she told my wife, my other sister-in-law, her mother, her husband, his mother, and everyone! They went to the station. They took along different things – clothing, etc. We didn't meet because I was on the second train. When I finally got to my sister-in-law it was 12 o'clock. The joy was great. Almost a whole night we didn't sleep. In the morning at 6 o'clock I was with my wife by her mother. She lived with her mother in 2 rooms and when I arrived we lived together. My house, my business was no more. I'll continue later because I want to add more about the time from Blechameer to Gross Rosen; the 12 days that we were walking.

You know for sure that everyone knows that we die. Everything that gets born, dies. A star, a stone, a person, everything has an ending. Everyone would like, when it comes his time to die, that he should have a fast death. But this is not the fate for each one. We can't pick this out. We can't choose for ourselves.

Let me say that the people that were going to the gas chambers did not know what was happening. They were given a little piece of soap and a towel. This was to take a shower. How else do you account or interpret being given a towel and soap? The room was closed automatically. Above,

there were pipes like for gas or a shower, but instead of water coming out, gas came out. This took about 2 or 3 minutes time and the people were dead. A quick death. Or a death from bombing. This is also mostly fast, also not a bad death. This doesn't mean I'm a bad person or a murderer. I want to show you what terrible deaths there are! Excuse me, I had to stop because lots of things came back to my mind.

I want to tell you that when we came to a village and went to where we were allotted to sleep at night, we arrived wet, half-frozen and everyone was satisfied to go faster inside to be under the roof, but what was inside no one knew. There were machines standing, shovels, axes, around things like that but no one saw then as we were being pushed inside. Each one of us wanted to get inside, worried that maybe there wouldn't be enough room and he would have to stay outside. There were other places like this where we were pushed in and it didn't take long before you heard yelling. A person went over something or fell or was pushed against a wall and others kept pushing him or if one fell and a foot was lying on something and second fell on top of him and a third person on top of that person, ten people went on top of this leg and fell. Can anyone imagine hundreds of people that cried out? It wasn't from one person who had fallen like that, there were lots of them. Can anyone imagine or hear these screams? The crying from these hundreds of people? I don't know – I continued to live, the fact is I'm here.

The next morning, they rushed us out of the room and we saw the dead! This kind of system on how we die, how the body is bent, broken, was terrible. Every day, the whole time we were going to Gross Rosen, those 12 days, there were always 10, 20, 30 missing and these were all acquaintances, people we knew slightly, friends, almost friends, but still friends. And this went on for a lot of those nights.

One time in a stall, in a big stall with the cries and the yammering, I fell asleep in a corner on a board, up high. I pulled myself up high, and I dreamt how I fell down and was holding myself only with the tips of my fingers and fearful that underneath was a grinding machine that grinds meat and "oh, oh" any minutes I would fall down. The fear, oh, it was terrible! In the morning there was again dead people.

Do you know or realize that in order to lose 3000 people in 12 days, that every hour there as to be dead ones, otherwise it couldn't be? 3000 people are a lot of people. All were Jews!

That's why I always say to my brother or my sister-in-law, Fanny, when they bemoan that the foot hurts, or the shoulders or the back hurts or they have a headache, that it is not good to have a headache, but don't think of these things. We can live with a headache. This is what I wanted to add to the other tale.

Let's say all of you, oh, me too- we see it many times, the pictures in a movie that show the camps and what happened from the ghettos and the camps how the bones are lying, how they put them together, what they did with them- this is still as you say in English – after the fact! After the happenings. It is not the same as when you see it yourself! Or you are a part of the happenings.

I tried to report a few times not only when I was asked what happened over there but a lot of times. I wanted to report it so that it wouldn't remain like the Germans wanted it, that there wouldn't be any witnesses. That was their whole hope in carrying us back and forth and pulling us here and there, because each time they took us, we got less and less--fewer people. But every time I felt like telling something or starting something, someone always said, "We saw all that" Where did you see it? "We saw it in the movies," Said Moishe Lieb. "We saw it on television. Forget those things. Those things that happened but not experienced, not seen in person.

"So what do you think my Brotchick?" says Richard to his brother, Sam.

"Well, says Sam, this is such a sad, tragic thing that there is nothing to say about this. It is such a happening that you can't begin to sense it. What a person endured and to say like we say and "end" that you my loving brother remained living and saved yourself and we would also like to hear more of how you saved yourself and how you got back with living people and how you were found and that you were saved!"

Save? Safe we are never. As long as we have Nixon and Agnew, that's how long no one is safe, not only me, said Richard.

Sam – “I don’t mean saved in that sense. I mean safe from the camp you were in at the concentration camps. What you endured, from that I mean saved, how we found you our brother, how we brought you here to America.”

Richard – “This belongs to a past, but I’m talking about the future. Everyone has to work and do his utmost, all the things that go together against such (??) and leaders of the people like our government is.

Sam – I think I remarked in the beginning that we have to see to it, to fight, that there should never again stand up a Hitler or any such name whatever land it would be and to make it so that the peoples should be free from just this kind of frightening (??) that this should never again happen. We should never forget or forgive.

Richard: Alright Brother (??) let’s be strong.

Pop-Sam- And from my side, brother, all my ability, all that my strength will allow to see to it to fight just this to fight against the fascism under whatever hardships.

Richard: “This is all my brother.”



S. P. LAK
LUX



